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'Eager to help Gaza', Pakistan jumps on peace board bandwagon

• Over 20 states, including eight-nation Muslim bloc, decide to join proposed President Trump-led 'Board of Peace' • Officials defend move as 'strategic necessity', 'pragmatic step' to stop genocide in Gaza • Islamabad believes process will lead to the realisation of Palestinians' right to self-determination

By Baqir Sajjad Syed

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Wednesday announced its decision to join US President Donald Trump's 'Board of Peace', saying it would participate to support the implementation of a Gaza peace plan anchored in a United Nations Security Council resolution.

A statement issued by the Foreign Office said Pakistan had decided to join the board "as part of its ongoing efforts to support the implementation of the Gaza Peace Plan under the framework of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2803."

The charter of the 'Board of Peace' is scheduled to be signed on Thursday on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos. Diplomatic sources said around 60 countries have been invited to join the body, with more than 25 having conveyed their acceptance so far.

Pakistan's announcement came at a time when seven other Muslim states welcomed the invitation to join the board. In a joint statement, the foreign ministers of Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Turkiye, Saudi Arabia and Qatar welcomed the invitation extended to their leaders. "The ministers announce their countries' shared decision to join the Board of Peace. Each country will sign the joining documents according to its respective relevant legal and other necessary procedures, including Egypt, Pakistan, and the UAE, that have already announced to join," the joint statement said.

It should be noted that all eight countries had worked with Trump in October last year on a plan to end Israel's genocide and invasion in Gaza. The UAE had announced its decision to join the board on Tuesday.

Pakistan's decision follows its growing involvement in US-led diplomacy on Gaza. The announcement came amid rising international concern that the scope of the 'Board of Peace' could be expanded beyond Gaza. Critics argued that what was initially presented as a UN-backed mechanism to oversee a specific peace plan risks evolving into a parallel forum that could dilute the role of the United Nations in conflict resolution.

In its statement, FO said Pakistan hoped the creation of the new framework would translate into concrete outcomes on the ground. "Pakistan expresses the hope that with the creation of this framework, concrete steps will be taken towards the implementation of a permanent ceasefire, further scaling up of humanitarian aid for the Palestinians, as well as reconstruction of Gaza," it said.

Israeli forces kill three journalists among 11 in Gaza: Page 12

Reaffirming Islamabad's long stated position on Palestine, the statement added that Pakistan hoped the process would lead to "the realisation of the right to self-determination of the people of Palestine, through a credible, time-bound political process, consistent with international legitimacy and relevant UN resolutions," resulting in "the establishment of an independent, sovereign, and contiguous State of Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital."

The FO also underscored Pakistan's

Continued on Page 5

TEHRAN: The gutted shells of buses are seen parked at a depot on the outskirts of the Iranian capital, during a tour for foreign media representatives following widespread protests across the country. Iranian state media reported on Wednesday that at least 3,117 people were killed during recent protests, which activists claim were suppressed with a deadly crackdown.—AFP Report on Page 11

PM Shehbaz sees export-led growth as 'only way forward'

• Says economic crisis has ended; seeks expanded cooperation with US; IMF director notes progress during structural reforms briefing • FM Dar discusses stronger trade, investment ties with Canadian, Finnish counterparts

By Syed Irfan Raza

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday declared that Pakistan had surmounted its economic challenges, pointing to reduced inflation and a decreased policy rate and stressed that the nation's economic future relies on export-led growth as the "only way forward".

Speaking at a breakfast event on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, the premier said Pakistan "has come out of crisis and moving forward with a sense of achievement and a sense of purpose".

While acknowledging that the export sector faces obstacles, PM Shehbaz insisted on the necessity of trade expansion.

"Our exports, collectively, do face different kinds of challenges," the prime minister noted. "But the way forward is very clear: Pakistan has to have export-led growth."

PM Shehbaz said the government has implemented "fundamental structural changes" to the system, specifically highlighting the digitalisation of revenue collection.

He said the tax collection-to-GDP ratio currently stands at 10.5 per cent, compared to 9 per cent two years ago, hailing it as a "significant achievement".

The prime minister also emphasised the potential of the mining and mineral sectors, citing agreements and memoranda of understanding with American and Chinese companies.

"Pakistan has been blessed with infinite natural resources still buried in the heap of mountains in the north of Pakistan, in Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan," he said.

Trump says 'framework of deal' on Greenland reached with Nato chief: Page 11

PM Shehbaz added that the country was "moving speedily" in the fields of cryptocurrency, artificial intelligence, and information technology.

"Our IT exports have shown remarkable progress in the last few years, in that we brought a lot of instruments which have facilitated IT exports, which stand at $3 billion annually," he said.

Regarding the country's youth, PM Shehbaz said federal and provincial governments had enacted programs for vocational training, resulting in "productive employment in Gulf states and other parts of the world".

Addressing foreign policy, PM Shehbaz expressed hope that Islamabad and Washington would "cooperate with each other in a big way" regarding minerals, counter-terrorism, IT, and AI.

"I think Pakistan is at a point in time where we are going to take off rapidly in agriculture, industry, the mining industry, AI and IT," he said. "I think that the future is very promising, I have no doubt about it."

Prior to his address, PM Shehbaz met with International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva on the sidelines of the forum. According to the Prime Minister's Office, the prime minister briefed Ms Georgieva on the improvement in Pakistan's macroeconomic indicators and

Continued on Page 5

What is Trump's 'Board of Peace' and what are its aims?

• States may only join if formally invited by US president
• France indicated it will not take part; Trump responded by threatening to impose steep tariffs on French wine

EXPLAINER

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump has invited countries to pay $1 billion in exchange for a permanent seat on a newly proposed initiative known as the "Board of Peace".

The body was initially envisioned as a mechanism to address Israel's war on Gaza, though its charter does not restrict its mandate solely to the occupied Palestinian territory.

Several states have been approached by the US to join the initiative.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif accepted the proposal to participate in the initiative with the aim of "achieving lasting peace in Gaza".

Board leadership and aims

According to *AFP*, the Board of Peace will be led by Trump under the terms outlined in its founding charter.

Under the charter, Trump will serve as chairman while also acting as the first representative of the United States. "The chairman shall have exclusive authority to create, modify, or dissolve subsidiary entities as necessary or appropriate to fulfil the Board of Peace's mission," the document says.

Trump will appoint members of an executive board, described as "leaders of global stature", who will serve two-year terms and can be removed by the chairman.

He may also, "acting on behalf of the Board of Peace", "adopt resolutions or other directives".

The chairman can only be replaced through "voluntary resignation or as a result of incapacity".

The document describes the board as "an international organisation that seeks to promote stability, restore dependable and

Continued on Page 5

Barrister Gohar seeks 'unconditional' dialogue with govt

Says Imran has allowed only Achakzai, Raja Nasir to negotiate, protest; slams 'carrot and stick' policy, asks govt to extend 'both hands for handshake'

By Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD: PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan on Wednesday urged the government to hold "unconditional" talks with the opposition, saying that there should be no conditions in dialogue between political parties.

Speaking to the media, Mr Gohar said that it was wrong to say that negotiations would only be held on specific topics.

"It is wrong to say that negotiations will be held on this topic but this topic cannot be included in negotiations," he said.

"If you want to hold dialogue, you should speak on all topics," he said. At the same time, the PTI chairman said that he did not have the authority to negotiate with the government.

He said that Mehmood Khan Achakzai and Allama Raja Nasir Abbas — who were recently appointed opposition leaders in the National Assembly and the Senate, respectively — had been given the authority to hold talks with the government.

IHC seeks replies in contempt plea over jail meeting denial: Page 3

New beginnings: Editorial on Page 6

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi has stated that PTI founder Imran Khan has given Mr Achakzai and Mr Abbas the responsibility of making decisions — be it about talks with the government

Continued on Page 5

Bill for secrecy of lawmakers' assets sails through NA

• PTI opposes law; PML-N supports it despite earlier reservations • House passes CSR bill mandating 1pc profit spending by large firms • Questions raised by minister over 18th Amendment spark controversy • Tallal Chaudhry says Imran is in good health, receiving facilities under jail rules • Illegal occupation of railway land by govt departments being regularised, NA told

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly on Wednesday passed a bill seeking secrecy of lawmakers' assets, a move that had been opposed by the PML-N and PTI in August last year. Interestingly, the bill, moved by PPP's Shazia Marri, had faced opposition from both parties during a committee meeting in August, but this time the PTI was the only party to oppose it.

The bill was taken up for immediate consideration soon after National Assembly's Standing Committee on Parliamentary Affairs Chairman Rana Iradat Sharif Khan presented the committee's report.

Under Section 137 of the Elections Act, all members of parliament and provincial assemblies are required to submit to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), on or before Dec 31 each year, a statement of their assets and liabilities, including those of their spouses and dependent children. Section 138 of the Act requires the ECP to publish these declarations in the official gazette.

PTI leaders condemn move to raise voting age from 18 to 25: Page 3

Lawmakers' asset law tweaks come under fire: Page 5

The proposed amendment to Section 138 seeks to insert a proviso stating: "Provided that the Speaker of the concerned Assembly or, as the case may be, the chairman of the Senate may, on an application made by a member and for reasons to be recorded in writing, by a ruling delivered in the chamber, determine that the statement of assets and liabilities of that member shall not be published publicly by the Commission if such publication would pose a serious threat to the life or safety of the member or, as the case may be, his family, for a period not exceeding one year at a time and subject to the condition that a complete and true statement of assets and liabilities shall be submitted confidentially to the Election Commission."

According to the statement of objects and reasons, the amendment aims to strike a balance between transparency and protection of individual rights. It states that while the publication of asset declarations promotes accountability, public trust and good governance, unrestricted disclosure could compromise the personal security and privacy of parliamentarians and their families.

Speaking in the House, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar explained that although members would still be required to submit their financial statements to the ECP, these may not necessarily be made public. He said the bill empowered legislative bodies to exercise greater control over the transparency of financial disclosures.

Barrister Gohar Ali Khan of the PTI strongly opposed the amendment, arguing that the proposed changes would transfer election-related matters from the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to a constitutional court, thereby undermining the judiciary's authority in electoral issues.

The House also passed the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) bill, making it mandatory for large companies with significant profits to spend one per cent of their profits on CSR activities. The statement of objects and reasons of the bill, moved by Dr Nafisa Shah and introduced through a supplementary agenda, stated that the corporate sector must contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of the poor and needy and help create a better environment for all.

'Imran in good health'

Minister of State for Interior Tallal Chaudhry told the House that all facilities were being provided to PTI founder Imran Khan in accordance with the jail manual and that he was in good health. He said meetings were allowed as per the rules and

Continued on Page 5

Alert issued as Pakistan braces for widespread rains today

ISLAMABAD: The authorities on Wednesday issued an alert amid a forecast of heavy rain and snow across the country on Jan 22 and 23, which may flood streams and cause road closures.

According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), rain and heavy snowfall will affect all provinces as well as the northern regions during the forecast period, as the National Disaster Management Authority asked citizens to take precautions.

Naran, Kaghan, Dir, Swat, Kalam, Chitral, Kohistan, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Shangla, Astore, Hunza, Skardu, Murree, Galiyat, Neelum Valley, Bagh, Poonch, Haveli, and Rawalakot will experience heavy rain and snowfall.

In Punjab, widespread intermittent rain and thunderstorms are expected across major cities, including Rawalpindi and Lahore. In Islamabad, cloudy weather is expected with intermittent rain, while heavy rain and hailstorms may occur at isolated places.

Balochistan and KP will also experience widespread intermittent rain and snow across all major districts. In Sindh, cold and cloudy weather is expected across most of the province, with rain likely in Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, and Larkana, among other cities.

In light of the wet spell, NDMA asked provincial and district administrations to be on alert. Punjab's PDMA also urged tourists and residents to take precautionary measures as heavy rain and snowfall are forecast in Murree, Galiyat etc.—Dawn Report

ON OTHER PAGES

More bodies found in Gul Plaza, toll at 61

In a harrowing development, at least 30 bodies charred beyond recognition were recovered from a crockery shop in Gul Plaza on Wednesday afternoon, bringing the overall death toll to 61, officials said. Karachi South DIG Syed Asad Raza told *Dawn* that all the bodies had been recovered from a single shop located on the mezzanine floor of the destroyed building. **Page 13**

ICC refuses to shift B'desh WC matches

The ICC on Wednesday rejected Bangladesh's demand to shift their matches at next month's Twenty20 World Cup outside India, casting doubt on their participation in next month's tournament. The Bangladesh Cricket Board has repeatedly refused to play its games in India, and the government insists it will not be pressured into changing its stance. **Page 18**